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SUBJECT: COTE D'IVOIRE: SRSG PONDERING UNOCI'S FUTURE

REF: ABIDJAN 411

Classified By: Ambassador Wanda Nesbitt for Reasons 1/4 (B/D)

¶1. (C) Summary: Given the increasing likelihood that elections scheduled for November 29 may be postponed, SRSG Choi has begun consulting with resident diplomats about the future of UNOCI. An extension of UNOCI's mandate through December 2009 is anticipated when the Security Council meets to review the issue in late July. The consensus here appears to be that if and when a postponement is announced (probably in September) the Security Council should send a strong signal that the GOCI needs to demonstrate a stronger intent to live up to the promise of elections in order to retain the support of the UN and the international community. End Summary

¶2. (SBU) UNSRSG Choi met July 8 with a small group of diplomats to brainstorm about the future of UNOCI in light of increasing signs that elections will not be held as scheduled in November. Attendees included the US, Canada, Germany, Switzerland, and the EU, AU and ECOWAS representatives. Choi said he did not anticipate problems with UNOCI's mandate, due to expire July 31, being renewed for now, but solicited our views on what role UNOCI could/should continue to play if the Ivorian government again fails to deliver promised elections.

ELECTION PREPARATION TIMELINE DELAYED AGAIN

¶3. (C) Choi opened by saying that the conventional wisdom has been that elections are technically possible but the political will to hold them is weak. The equation has changed, in Choi's view, and he believes elections may now be technically impossible even if the political will to hold them is strong (or strengthens). The SRSG said his view shifted after the president of the Independent Electoral Commission (CEI), Robert Mambe, declined help from the UN (and the EU) to transport voter enrollment forms to centers in Abidjan where the data could be computerized. Mambe has opted instead to wait for generators and other material to be transported from Abidjan to the 58 centers that still are not functioning. (Mambe was reportedly concerned about the chances of data being lost and/or tampered with if the paper forms are centralized in Abidjan; the SRSG sees the decision, however, as another indication that there is no real sense of urgency about holding the election.) Mambe's decision means that the computerization of data will not start before July 20 and a preliminary voter list will not be produced before September 1. Barring changes to the electoral code, this makes it impossible for the GOCI to complete all the steps that are required (see reftel) for elections to be held on November 29.

HOW MUCH CAN ONUCI ACCOMPLISH?

¶4. (SBU) The conversation centered on what steps the UN (or member states) could take to push the process further down the road if the key actors are satisfied with the speed at which things are currently moving. The AU and ECOWAS reps both stressed that Ivorians are more interested in peaceful elections than rapid elections; the EU rep noted that politically-savvy Ivorians have long talked of elections taking place in 2010 and that we should not undervalue how

far Cote d'Ivoire has come since 2004. We all agreed that as long as the Ivorian public and political opposition are willing to be patient and wait, it will be difficult for the international community to spur action. There was also agreement, however, that once it is certain that elections will not take place this year, the UN should send a very strong signal that it cannot maintain "an open-ended commitment" -- with specific regard to UN peacekeeping troops -- without a stronger demonstration from the Ivorian side that the commitment to elections is real.

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